Constructing the Folk Cultural Sphere : Agency, Media and Authority

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2021-07-08

Frog , M 2021 , ' Constructing the Folk Cultural Sphere : Agency, Media and Authority ' , þÿ E t h n o l o g i a E u r o p a e a , v o l . 5 1 , n o . 1 , p p . 1 5 6 1 8 5 . h t t p s : / / d o i . o r g / 1 0

http://hdl.handle.net/10138/333137
https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.1891

Ethnologia Europaea

Frog 2021: Constructing the Folk Cultural Sphere. *Ethnologia Europaea* 51(1): 156–185. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.1891

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Constructing the Folk Cultural Sphere

Agency, Media and Authority

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This paper explores the dynamics of agency, media and authority in the maintenance and construction of the folk cultural sphere – that is, a society's generalized perception and understanding of traditional culture. The phenomenon is explored through a series of cases, organized chronologically, on: medieval manuscript technologies and Snorri Sturluson's Edda; seventeenth- and eighteenth-century written representations of Sámi; a nineteenth-century living ethnographic exhibition of Sámi; current fieldwork documenting Rotenese and Tetun traditions in Indonesia; a community-driven living ethnographic exhibition on the island of Java. The final discussion takes an overview of the perspectives gained from the individual cases to consider their broader implications.

In memoriam of Barbro Klein

Barbro Klein was sensitive to gaps where an assumption or intuition of coherence and cohesion conceals a disjunction. She took particular interest in the gap that could open between culture or a tradition and the image of it that circulates in discourse. In order to address this phenomenon, she developed the term *folk cultural sphere* or *folklife sphere* to designate a society's generalized perception and understanding of traditional culture and the multivocal discourse through which it is constructed and maintained (esp. 2000, 2006).[1] Klein's concept provides a valuable tool because it distinguishes culture and practices from how they are imagined and from the ideologies linked to them in that imagining. This distinction facilitates bringing into focus processes of selection and representation involved in the construction of the image of, for example, a tradition as heritage. An important aspect of this concept is that it is not restricted to images of culture seen as the heritage of one group as opposed to others. Instead, it includes the diversity of images identified with traditional culture relative to a particular society or group, even if the images may be linked to different ethnic identities.

In developing the concept as a tool, Klein was centrally interested in the processes of selection and representation that filter practices and transform them into symbolic capital and anchors for identity. She explored questions of whose traditions become included and excluded in the Swedish folk cultural sphere, and the construction of, for instance, Sámi traditional culture within that sphere and stance-taking connected to it (Klein 2000). Her focus is at the national level in the case of Sweden, where national identity emerged from the Romantic ideology of "one language, one culture, one nation" (cf. Tarkka, Stepanova & Haapoja-Mäkelä 2018: 28; also Wilson 1976: 4–5), resulting in an "authorized" (Smith 2006: 11) or "dominant" (Kroskrity 2001: 203) discourse. In other milieux, the situation can be more complex, but Klein's concept can be applied to the perspective of any society or group or be used for looking at the interplay of perspectives and stances associated with them.

The present article sets out to develop more nuanced perspectives on Klein's concept by exploring the dynamics of agency, media and authority in the construction and negotiation of folk cultural spheres. These dynamics are investigated and illustrated through a series of case studies from different societies and historical periods, organized chronologically and following two complementary strands. One follows

[1] Barbro Klein's term makes conscious reference to the earlier commonplace use of the term *folk culture* to refer to objectified images of the culture and practices of non-modern groups or societies, while the deconstruction of the term *folk* across the last decades of the twentieth century allows it to be used for any group or society rather than only those considered "other" from the perspective of modernized societies. *Tradition* and *traditional* are here heuristic terms for that which is viewed from some position as rooted in the past while being characteristic of either a contemporary culture, society or group with which it is identified or of past forms of that culture, society or group.

representations and documentations of culture through texts manifested materially or electronically through different technologies, from medieval manuscripts to digital recording; the other follows self-objectifying embodied performance of culture on display from early nineteenth-century ethnographic exhibitions to what are known as tourism villages today. The two strands converge in current fieldwork and media representations. The cases have been chosen for their combination of diversity and complementarity, covering a range of media in different historical environments as well as agency exerted from different social positions. Comparison across case studies aims to advance beyond the individual empirical studies to bring underlying patterns and principles into focus. In order to explore the dynamics of engaging and manipulating a folk cultural sphere, Klein's concept is here complemented with the concept of semiotic ideologies, an outgrowth of language ideology research in linguistic anthropology.

The term *semiotic ideology* refers to "basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world" (Keane 2003: 419). These ideologies extend to beliefs, emotions and evaluations concerning signs, their uses and relations to empirical, imaginal and social worlds (see also Kroskrity 2001: 498). When culture is understood as constituted of distinct, socially accessible signs and sign systems (Urban 1991: 1), the folk cultural sphere can be approached in terms of such signs. Semiotic ideologies provide a framework for the social perception of these signs, their associations and how they are evaluated and understood. Like language, other cultural signs, sign systems and their varieties can become emblematic or iconic of the social images that they index (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37). Ideologies simplify the semiotic field so that certain features and relations come into focus while other features and potential inconsistencies with expectation may be rendered semiotically *invisible* (Lotman 1990: 58) or subject to *erasure* (Irvine & Gal 2000: 38) in representation and interpretation. Tensions between ideological evaluation and experience can also lead to the eradication of such inconsistencies (Irvine & Gal 2000: 38; Stepanova 2020). *Dominant ideologies* are those "that have become successfully 'naturalized' by the majority of the group" (Kroskrity 2001: 203); they operate in relation to a multiplicity of ideologies that vary in relation to positions in systems of both social relations and practices (Irvine & Gal 2000: 35). Relevant here are also the concepts of *media ideology* and *text ideology*. Media ideologies are associated with the meanings and evaluations linked to different media, such as oral speech versus writing (Gershon 2010). Text ideologies concern what it means for something to be a text and, for instance, how such a text is situated in relation to people or knowledge in society and evaluated relative to other texts and other types of texts (Frog 2019).

The concept of semiotic ideology is complementary to that of a folk cultural sphere. A folk cultural sphere consists of groups and systems of signs to which (potentially competing) ideologies become attached. The signs themselves may only be divorced from ideologies in the abstraction of analysis. Semiotic ideology offers a framework for approaching "the paradoxical categorizations, exclusions and tacit assumptions" (Klein 2000: 6) that characterize a folk cultural sphere while also providing an instrument for movement between perspectives and competing interpretations and evaluations of their constituent signs. Taken together, it becomes possible to bring into focus the gaps between practices or culture and the folk cultural sphere on the one hand and ideologies linked to folk cultural spheres on the other. These tools enable multidimensional perspectives on folk cultural spheres and their operation in society, both for approaching broad patterns and when considering particular acts and actors.

Snorri Sturluson and Manuscript Technologies

The folk cultural sphere is built on a reflexive awareness of certain phenomena of culture as "traditional", which requires some degree of objectification that emerges in relation to things that are deemed not traditional. Such objectification is characteristic of the metadiscourse of heritage construction (e.g. Waterton & Watson 2015; Hafstein 2018), which tends to be viewed as a phenomenon of modernity (e.g. Anttonen 2005). This makes it relevant to bring an earlier example into focus. Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) was a remarkably active author or perhaps orchestrator of texts at a time when the manuscript culture of Iceland was just beginning to flourish. The legal conversion of Iceland to Christianity in the year 1000 carried the Church with its infrastructures to the island, which included technologies for manuscript production. Vernacular literature began to emerge already in the mid-twelfth century, gaining momentum in the thirteenth (see Nordal 2001). Snorri was a politician and poet, well-learned in vernacular culture and history. His work called *Edda* is internationally known today mainly as a compendium of Scandinavian mythology, but it is actually a four-part *ars poetica* (Faulkes 1987, 1998, 1999, 2005). Much could be said about this work and its social and historical context, but only a few key points are brought into focus here.

Edda is a unique work in medieval European literature, produced at a time when Old Norse vernacular written genres were taking shape. Snorri's motivations for planning and producing *Edda* seem to have been personal. In broad strokes, since the settlement of Iceland from the end of the ninth century (mainly by people from Norway), certain families of Icelanders used forms of oral poetry to win patronage and renown abroad, to the point that Icelanders seemed to corner the market on being court poets in Scandinavia. Snorri clearly wanted to capitalize on his own skill. A contemporary

saga by his nephew records how he first visited Norway in 1218–1220. The young King Hákon Hákonarson (1204–1263) was centrally interested in the court culture being imported from England and the European continent. Snorri was well rewarded for his poems elsewhere, so the saga's lack of comment on poetry presented to King Hákon suggests that Snorri failed to gain his patronage as a poet. Snorri produced *Edda* soon after returning to Iceland. This *ars poetica*'s concluding fourth part, *Háttatal* (An inventory of poetic forms) (Faulkes 1987, 1999), is an exegesis of poetic forms, which integrates a 102-stanza praise poem dedicated to young Hákon and his ward, each stanza illustrating a poetic form, explained in prose. The first 8 stanzas illustrate the poetry's basic principles, followed by 94 stanzas in distinct verse forms. It is a praise poem that implicitly seeks to incite a commodity exchange and establish a relationship between patron and poet, simultaneously illustrating and explicating Snorri's virtuosity. Snorri did not return to Norway and very likely sent his *Edda* as a written book to the king – although histories do not mention this either, and Snorri subsequently took up history writing (see further Wanner 2008: chapter 2).

Edda seems to have been produced with the dual intention of both receiving patronage as a poet and teaching the young king to understand and appreciate the poetry for which patronage should be received (Wanner 2008). Its four parts are generally considered to have been developed in reverse order, beginning with the fourth part, *Háttatal*. Court poetry was characterized by a generative system of what are called kennings and *heiti* forming a nominal equivalence vocabulary that can be notoriously difficult to penetrate. The third part, *Skáldskaparmál* (Language of poetic art) (Faulkes 1987, 1998), teaches the reader this idiom, bountifully illustrated with well over 300 quotations of verse from poets, some of whom lived as early as the ninth century. It also includes a number of stories from non-Christian mythology and heroic lore relevant to understanding certain kennings like "speech of giants" as an alternative way of saying "gold" through reference to a mythological event (see also Wanner 2008: chapter 7). The second part, *Gylfaginning* (The deluding of Gylfi) (Faulkes 1987, 2005), offers an overview of non-Christian mythology from the first stages of creation to the destruction and rebirth of the world, presented within a dialogue between deceptive sorcerers and a King Gylfi. The first part, known as the Prologue (ibid.), explains the origin of the non-Christian gods as sorcerers from Asia (authenticated through an etymology of a vernacular word for "gods", Æsir, as referring to their origin in Asia). These sorcerers are linked to histories of both the Bible and the Trojan War. Chapter 1 of *Skáldskaparmál* also includes the same disclaimer, asserting that one should not believe in pagan gods, and that the book is "for scholarly inquiry and entertainment" (Faulkes 1987: 64, 1998: 5).

Through a personalized explication and collection of verse, *Edda* presents an image of the oral poetry tradition and its rich history with which Snorri aligns himself. This work also asserts non-Christian mythology's value, relevance and interest to contemporary society, presented as something that is important for interpreting the rich and significant heritage of poetry (which was already being quoted as authoritative evidence in history writing: e.g. Nordal 2001, 2009). *Edda* presents a narrative that reinterprets the gods as human sorcerers and rejects Scandinavian non-Christian religion as deception. It then salvages knowledge of the mythology as both relevant to the poetry and as entertaining by reframing it from religiously other (pagan) to historically other, separated by a boundary of knowledge and ideology. *Edda* takes up established and familiar systems of cultural signs and contests contemporary ideologies that stigmatized some as "pagan" and presumably devalued others, perhaps as old-fashioned. Snorri's work advocates their interpretation through an ideology that cleans them up and valorizes them, much as systems of signs were taken up from peasant culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and reinvented as heritage (Anttonen 2005).

Snorri's *Edda* is not an objective or scientific representation of traditional culture. Its presentation is shaped by models linked to pedagogy and the organization of knowledge in medieval Latin written culture (Clunies Ross 2005). It also exhibits a general inclination to systematize and increase categorical distinctions both in poetry and mythology. Snorri's dazzling parade of 94 meters significantly expanded conventional poetic forms by, for example, systemizing a formal variation of a couplet found in earlier poets and making that variation a principle for a whole stanza (Faulkes 1999: xiii–xvi). Actually, his innovative handling of the poetic system "exemplifies the development in attitudes to poetry in Iceland that led both to a greater awareness of literary and linguistic theory and to more academic styles of composition" (Faulkes 1999: xvi). His presentation of the language of poetry includes formal types of kenning not otherwise attested and reflects his own thinking about language in the changing intellectual environment of the early thirteenth century (Clunies Ross 1987).

Assessing what Snorri did with mythology is methodologically challenging because of the limited evidence for comparison, but it is clear that he both generated new terms for supernatural "races" (Holtsmark 1964: 37) and also used and distinguished existing terms in new ways (Simek 2010[2006]; Frog 2021). What is presented of the mythology is clearly structured by the aims and organization of the work. In *Skáldskaparmál*, stories simply shift into explications of kennings mid-narration. In its turn, *Gylfaginning* is centrally concerned with the arc of time from the creation to the destruction and rebirth of the world, with emphasis on cosmology and kinship relations. Stories presented are linked to these concerns, although the information

seems in places to reflect juxtapositions from a variety of genres (e.g. Lorenz 1984: chapter 49; Frog 2010: 243–250). The exception is a cycle of Thor's adventures in the middle, leading up to and following his visit to an adversary called "*Útgarða*-Loki" – which probably meant something like "outlaw Loki" (Liberman 1992: 101), although Snorri places Loki on the same adventure, separating these into two characters much as other equivalent terms are used as designating separate races. The adventure cycle is built from traditions related to Thor (Lorenz 1984: chapters 45–47, 48; McKinnell 1994: chapter 3). However, Thor and his companions are consistently shown to be ineffective and *Útgarða*-Loki is the only otherworld adversary who overcomes Thor rather than vice versa, making it look like a parody. Moreover, challenges faced by Thor and his companions are characterized by illusions that would be betrayed if the heroes would recognize the thing behind the name (e.g. thought, fire) or decode visual kennings: in a treatise on the traditional poetry, this invites reading the story as an allegory about interpreting poetic language (Frog 2011: 19). Snorri's presentations of both the poetry and the mythology involve processes of selection and representation that combine tradition and innovation. These processes not only produce *Edda* as a unique work but also produce unique and accessible models of the traditions that eliminated their variations and made them appear more or less coherent.

Although the sources for the first centuries of Iceland's Christianization are quite limited, people and families who took up the new writing technologies seem to have held advantage and superseded those who did not; by the thirteenth century, competence in literate culture had become essential to prominent social-political roles (Gísli Sigurðsson 2004: 90). The changes are indicative of changing ideologies surrounding the medium itself, which must be considered when looking at *Edda*'s impacts – that is, the material medium's authority augmented its impacts. *Edda* was followed by an increase in uses of mythological references in poetic composition (Fidjestøl 1999: 270–293). *Skáldskaparmál* is the most-copied part of *Edda*, and scribes added to its collection of hundreds of verse examples (Faulkes 1998). Changes in the intellectual environment carried by the Renaissance[2] (Malm 2018) sparked a revival of interest in the poetry Snorri represented. This heritage had not survived in oral tradition, but studying *Edda* enabled people to compose new verses (e.g. Sverdlov & Vanherpen 2017). It is also likely that Snorri's mythography had corresponding early impacts, stimulating the documentation of whole eddic poems on mythological subjects as well as shaping how the mythology was perceived (Frog 2011). In subsequent centuries, Snorri's mythography appears to *become* the mythology: its narratives were adapted directly for

[2] The changes in knowledge and society during the Renaissance mark the transition from the Middle Ages. These changes were carried into the North through educated members of society, who were active in international networks.

the composition of *rímur* poetry, stanzas based on Snorri's mythography were added to manuscript copies of eddic poems and it became a source for mythology in composing neo-eddic poetry (Lassen 2018). *Edda* gradually became the representation of these traditions for future generations.

Edda is the project of a single individual's agency that objectifies and constructs contemporary traditional culture and its relevance to the present. In an oral tradition, an agent's authority is linked to participation in social practices, but the dynamics of authority can become quite complex. To borrow Erving Goffman's (1981: 144–146) terminology, the *author* of a poem, the agent responsible for the text uttered, may be distinct from its *animator*, the one who utters it, and also potentially from the *principle*, the person behind the utterance, as when the embodied animator is perceived as speaking on behalf of another or for a collective, or is seen as animated by a supernatural agent. Authority can reside in knowledge of, and responsibility for, words of other authors or knowledge of texts from which authorship is ideologically erased, such as traditional riddles, aphorisms and so on, or potentially assigned to historical or mythic agents, as in mythological and heroic narrative poems of gods' and heroes' direct speech. Authority may also reside in the relationship to a principle, as well as in authorship or in skill as an animator (e.g. a beautiful singer). In *Edda*, Snorri is the principle and seems to be the author and animator (although he may also have simply been directing scribes, i.e. the principle directing animators). Through the quotation of verses, Snorri is also animating the speech of other authoritative authors as well as the texts as speech attributed to gods and heroes. Handling these quotations further displays his knowledge and skills, reinforcing his authority. Crucial, however, is his translation of oral culture into a medium which itself indexes authority, producing an objectified compendium of knowledge and skill as a materially enduring utterance, which again reflects back on Snorri. Through this interplay of systems of authority, *Edda* (gradually) succeeded as an instrument to restructure ideologies linked to vernacular poetry and mythology.

Once materialized, *Edda* also began to circulate as an independent entity, as a text of traditional knowledge from which authorship was ideologically erased (i.e. it was normally treated as anonymous). This text became an independent authority that was central in constructing areas of the folk cultural sphere, and it became an enduring image of the relevant traditions for which it first became the authoritative, and later a more or less exclusive, frame of reference. However, it remains Snorri's construct. *Edda* is thus more than simply a combination of tradition and innovation: Snorri's principles of selection and representation became central to the construction of these areas of the folk cultural sphere – determinants of what became emblematic and what

was erased. Irrespective of how *Edda* reflects contemporary language ideologies, in the case of the language of traditional poetry (*Skáldskaparmál*), Snorri clearly constructed it as a language of nouns without reference to other classes of words or phrases, syntax or poetic form, while his extensive selection of quotations no doubt left many forms of verse invisible. Parallel impacts on the construction of mythology in the folk cultural sphere are difficult to assess but were doubtless no less significant.

Sámi as an Exotic Other in Early Print

An important aspect of Klein's concept is that it comprises the spectrum of signs modelling traditional culture, irrespective of the culture that they index. Klein addresses the Sámi in the context of Sweden "as the very embodiment of the conquered exotic others" (Klein 2000: 12). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, representations of Sámi began circulating in new ways related to changes in the intellectual environment and changing technologies for text reproduction. Already in the literature of Snorri's time, the Sámi (or rather *Finnar*, referring to mobile cultures of the North generally) were established in the folk cultural sphere as Scandinavians' most intimate other (cf. Aalto 2014). In the sixteenth century, Renaissance humanism became linked to the identity construction of emerging Scandinavian states. There was competition especially between Denmark and Sweden to build a glorious national past that evolved a fascination with the distinctive historical culture of Scandinavia (Malm 2018). In the early seventeenth century, this produced cultural documentation projects. In 1630, King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden established the National Heritage Board and appointed the first National Antiquarian (Almgren 1931; Klein 2006: 58). The Renaissance spirit cast a wide net in cultural documentation, but it was not clear beforehand to what uses the constructed images of the dominant culture's past would be put. The documentation project therefore extended to information about the kingdom's resources and the peoples who were its subjects, including the Sámi (Wilson 1976: chapter 1; Ahola & Lukin 2019: 51).

During this period, manuscript technologies were being superseded by printing, which gradually developed infrastructures to allow the increasingly wide and accessible circulation of texts. These works could contain visual images such as the 100 plates in Knud Leem's description of the Sámi published in 1767 (**Figure 1**). Works discussing Sámi culture and religion began being produced from the second half of the seventeenth century, especially in connection with missionary work. The circulation of these texts created a new discourse on Sámi culture. They were predominantly written by non-Sámi, critical of what they regarded as paganism among a primitive people. Concerning missionaries' accounts, the historian of religions scholar Håkan Rydving states:

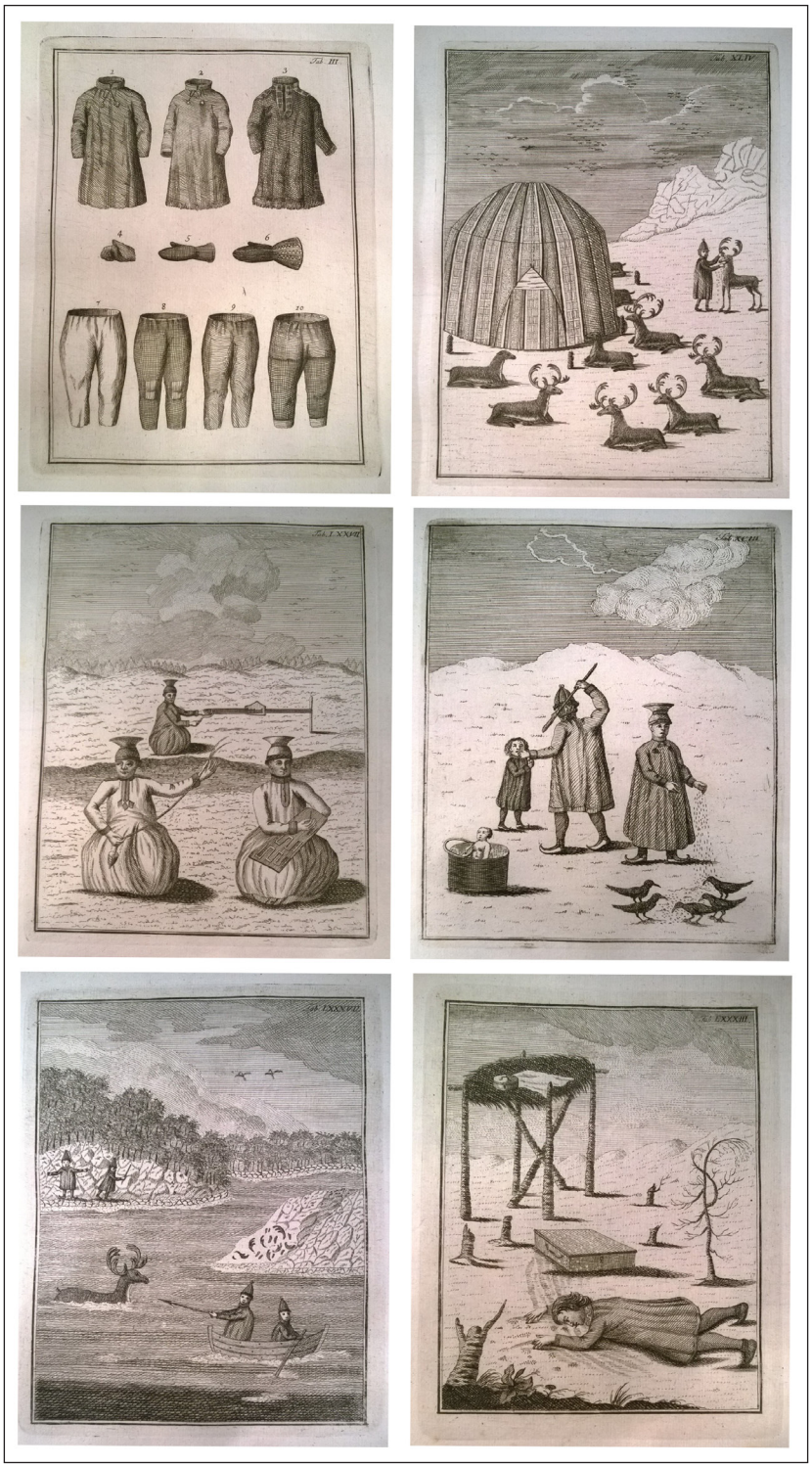

Figure 1: Plates 3, 44, 77, 93, 87, 83, depicting Sámi culture from the Norwegian priest Knud Leem's *Beskrivelse over Finmarkens lapper, deres tungemaal, levemaade og forrige afgudsdyrkelse* (Description of Finmark's Lapps, their language, way of life and earlier idolatry), 1767.

> The purpose of these writings was not scholarly in the sense that the authors aimed at impartial description. Instead, they wanted to understand Sami thought better in order to fight the indigenous religion more effectively. [...] The authors were interested in theological matters, and this determined the questions they put to the Sami they interrogated. There is nothing to indicate that their questions were relevant to the essentials of Sami religion. (Rydving 2010: 58)

Missionaries' writing practices were linked to Sweden's new paradigm of cultural documentation, but they reproduced information from wherever they found it, sometimes with no first-hand knowledge (Rydving 2010: chapter 4). As with Snorri's *Edda*, materially reproduced texts circulated as autonomous authoritative sources of knowledge. Contemporary Western text ideologies viewed learned texts as authoritative knowledge that could be reduplicated and combined with knowledge from other such texts independent of personal experience. There existed some early wider awareness of "Laplanders" (Hagen 2013: 141–142), but their culture only began to enter the broader European folk cultural sphere through the circulation of texts such as Bernard Picart's *Ceremonies et coutumes religieuses des peoples idolatres* (1728: 371–386). Elements of Sámi culture were established in the folk cultural spheres of Scandinavians, drawing on features seen as emblematic of difference and constructing the Sámi as ethnically other, exotic and inferior (see also Gal & Irvine 2019). The sources of knowledge behind the works of missionaries and similarly oriented writers in Scandinavia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are for the most part unclear, but the authors were not interested in animating Sámi voices. They report *about* what Sámi people believe and do, with full control over the process of selection and representation, while presenting themselves as authoritative with their etic perspectives and evaluative stance-taking. Both Sámi voices and agency – the potential to play a role in determining what was presented and in what way – were generally absent from the models of Sámi culture such authors construct (cf. Cocq & DuBois 2020). The representations are informed by the latters' ideologies: the Sámi were seen as a hegemonic cultural category, erasing differences between Sámi groups (Rydving 2010: 57). These texts became new instruments in structuring the folk cultural sphere, taking on an authority of their own and a materiality through their medium. As with Snorri's *Edda*, this enabled them to become central sources for historical Sámi cultures up to the present day.

Sámi in Living Ethnographic Exhibitions

Living human displays of exotic cultures have occurred for centuries (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett [1991]1998: 41–42). The emergence of "human zoos" around the end of

the nineteenth century (becoming a standard feature of world's fairs) can be seen as evolving, like museums, from the collection and display of curiosities popular during the Renaissance (Blanchard et al. 2008a: 1–6). The development of human displays emerged from, among other factors, increasing anthropological interest and ease of mobility, and the rise of spectacle in the economy of public entertainment (ibid.). In terms of media, these exhibitions produce immediate engagements with performed ethnicity, in which cultural signs worn and embodied by agents are recontextualized and objectified with strategic aims. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes:

> Live displays [...] create the illusion that the activities you watch are being done rather than represented, a practice that creates the effect of authenticity, of realness. The impression is one of unmediated encounter. Semiotically, live displays make the status of the performer problematic, for people become signs of themselves. We experience a representation, even when the representers are the people themselves. Self-representation is representation none the less. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett [1991]1998: 55)

The aims of cultural representation shape the selection and representation of certain signs as emblematic or iconic. With a culture that is historically familiar for those creating the representation, like the Sámi for Scandinavia, the selection process will be in dialectic with contemporary signs and models established in the folk cultural sphere. If the culture is completely alien, the process of selection and representation may be shaped more completely by the aims and strategies of responsible agents – and also subject to historical trends, such as foregrounding emblems of exoticism, primitiveness or savagery (see also Blanchard et al. 2008a: 7–12). Strategic framing gradually equips folk cultural spheres with models for broad categories like "primitive people", creating a framework of expectations in relation to which exhibitions could be staged. Whereas ideological erasure occurs at the level of models and interpretations, the selective staging of exhibitions could eradicate or delete signs that would conflict with those ideologies or the aims of presentation (e.g. foregrounding savagery). Nineteenth-century ethnographic exhibitions were thus shaped in relation to ideologies, which reciprocally constructed them and the sign systems constitutive of the folk cultural sphere.

Whereas early textual representations of Sámi culture largely or wholly excluded Sámi agency, living ethnographic exhibitions involve collaborative representation (at least where the performers are not themselves outsiders to the culture performed). There remains an asymmetry between the cultural representatives and the organizers of the exhibition, but that asymmetry in organizing and managing the venue, advertising and profiting from it, does not necessarily exclude cultural representatives from

authority and agency within the framework of an exhibition. There could be an extreme of domination and objectification (Blanchard et al. 2008a), but this was certainly not true in all cases (Baglo 2014).

Reindeer with accompanying Sámi had been given as diplomatic gifts since the late Middle Ages (Klein 2000: 12; Klein 2006: 75 n. 8), no doubt sometimes shown off as exotic objects privately or at parties. However, the earliest significant ethnographic exhibition of Sámi is William Bullock's (Baglo 2014: 139). This exhibition took place in the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, London, from January to Easter 1822, moving to the Spring Gardens until May, and then touring to Ireland, Scotland and Liverpool before returning to London from November 1822 until January 1823 (Andersson Burnett 2016: 181–182 and n. 45). Bullock had gone to Scandinavia in 1821 and acquired a reindeer herd, hiring a Sámi family to herd them (Bullock 1822: 4–5), apparently with the intention of establishing reindeer herding in Britain (e.g. Pearce 2008: 23–25; Baglo 2014: 139–140; see also Bullock 1822: 37). He had curated exhibitions in the past and likely had ideas about organizing one surrounding Sámi material culture when he returned (Andersson Burnett 2016: 177). The exhibition that emerged, however, seems to have been a solution to a financial venture gone wrong: all the reindeer except four died in connection with delays and difficulties getting them through customs (Andersson Burnett 2016: 177–178). The collapse of the reindeer herding plan also changed the role of the Sámi family in Bullock's employ: Jens and Kerina Holms with their young son. Bullock immediately organized an exhibition around them and the remaining reindeer, an exhibition which also reportedly included objects from travels of both Sir Arthur de Capell Brooke and George Chichester Oxenden (Bullock 1822: 35 item #1, 37 item #12; cf. Pearce 2008: n. 56 items #1 and #8).

The exhibition was a financial success, said to have attracted 58,000 visitors in its first months (Alexander 1985: 131; Andersson Burnett 2016: 181). The exhibition book specifies the afternoon mealtime of the Sámi family (Bullock 1822: 36 item #5), objectifying even basic activities of daily life. At the same time, the audience was also allowed to engage with them directly: "they understand the Norwegian language, and an interpreter attends to answer any question that may be put to them" (Bullock 1822: 5–6). In one respect, this potentially created a "double duty as ethnographic specimen and museum docent" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett [1991]1998: 44, on a later exhibition by Bullock), but it also allowed the performers to have a voice in collaborative representation, not to mention engagement in complex interviews (e.g. Brooke 1823: 129–130). We should not assume that the performers felt used or devalued by the experience: Catherine Baglo (2014: 140) points out that the opposite was more likely the case. Objectification through display should also not be confused with the performers'

lack of agency; rather, their agency emerged in participation and activity within the exhibition, whereas Bullock was responsible for the exhibition itself.

Bullock's representation of the Sámi is particularly interesting because it seems to exhibit marked differences from later human zoos. The accuracy of contemporary engravings is open to question, but one of these presents the Sámi man holding a written or printed text (the exhibition book?) and the Sámi child with a local toy (Pearce 2008: 26, *fig. 5*). Such juxtapositions of the familiar with the exotic would most likely be deleted from later human exhibits as inconsistent with the display. Bullock also mitigated the Sámi family's cultural otherness by emphasizing moral and religious compatibility with their audience (Bullock 1822: 33–34). What seems to be the first edition of the exhibition book mentions a "drum of the Lapland Necromancers, now becoming extremely rare" (quoted in Thomas 2016: 324; cf. Pearce 2008: 33 n. 56 item #10), which disappears from what appears to be the second edition and thus presumably from the exhibition. An epilogue text was added to the later edition,[3] opening with a short comment on the exhibit, followed by an observation that alcoholism may be a common failing of Laplanders but "the people now exhibiting have, since their arrival in England, behaved with the strictest propriety" and "will probably return the richest people in the country. They deposit their little accumulations in the Savings Bank every week, and are constant in their attendance to the duties of their religion at the Swedish Lutheran Chapel" (Bullock 1822: 33–34). In other words, despite the condescending tone, they were affirmed as proper and frugal Christians while the artefact associated with pagan practices was removed. The motivations for these changes are unclear, but they bring into relief that the ethnographic exhibition focused on material culture and practical rather than spiritual aspects of life.

The exhibition as a medium of performed culture spread to public media, with which Bullock actively engaged. He "organized media stunts in which adverts, written as reports, told the readers that the family had been sightseeing, which drew attention to his show at the tourist monuments, but also reached readers across the country" (Andersson Burnett 2016: 182). In such representations, the performers are elevated to tourists, visiting monuments in the manner that readers might, narrowing the gap

[3] This is an inference based on Pearce's (2008: 33 n. 56) description of the text as 33 pages with a final, unnumbered page listing an inventory of ten items or displays in the exhibition; the statement concerning "since their arrival in England" (Bullock 1822: 33) invites an interpretation of a later date, but could merely be rhetorical. The edition to which I have access places a line across the page after the first paragraph on page 33, followed by another three paragraphs that continue onto page 34. The list of articles on display begins on page 35, which lacks a page number, but continues for another two pages, both numbered, with thirteen items or displays followed by a final paragraph about patrons' opportunity to feed the reindeer and the anticipation that reindeer will indeed be established as a source of delicious and affordable meat. Multiple editions of the book are unsurprising if there were some 58,000 visitors in the first months.

between them and their audience, so that their exoticism was linked to foreignness but not to a more fundamental otherness (see also Pearce 2008; Andersson Burnett 2016: 184–185). Through engagement with public media, discussion of the Sámi increased and press articles began citing a variety of published materials on the Sámi rather than only Bullock's book. These articles both "extended interest in the Sami beyond the exhibition" and people "who might not have the possibility of visiting the show themselves [...] also [...] learned about the Sami" (Andersson Burnett 2016: 183). Bullock's exhibition can be considered exceptional in the history of living ethnographic displays (cf. Blanchard et al. 2008b), but it played a potentially significant role in constructing the Sámi in the folk cultural sphere in England and more widely in Great Britain.

The development of living ethnographic exhibitions occurred in tandem with the circulation of publications like Picart's (1728) and the development of museums (Blanchard et al. 2008b). Collectively, these constructed an increasingly sophisticated folk cultural sphere of global scope that appears to have operated on the same pattern as the sort of national model being reproduced throughout Europe, but with a broader dominant Western perspective in relation to others of varying distinction. Thus, "Indonesian" art has become widely recognized, although the image is predominantly based on Balinese and Javanese carving and masks.

Performing Rotenese and Tetun Culture from Documentation to Politics

Indonesia is a country of remarkable diversity, with the number of languages variously estimated at roughly 700. In recent years, I have begun collaborating with James J. Fox of the Australian National University in work with ritual poets and keepers of traditional knowledge from different domains of the island of Rote (Rotenese) and West Timor (Tetun). Fox has worked with Rotenese traditions for the duration of his long career. He and the late Tom Therik, himself Rotenese, founded the Master Poets Project in 2006, initially planned for three years. This established a model for working collectively with a variety of poets for one week of intensive recording and discussion, as well as working with the poets to understand, transcribe and translate what has been recorded. Poets from different dialectal areas were brought to Bali to purposely remove them from local ritual constraints that restrict recitation. The top floor of a family hotel was chosen as the venue, becoming a familiar setting for all subsequent recording sessions, and the participating poets were able to develop instructive connections with one another.

The project has continued through the present, with the eleventh meeting held in Bali in 2019. Lintje Pellu, also Rotenese, became involved from the second meeting, and I became involved from the tenth, after the gatherings were extended to include

Tetun specialists. The environment of these meetings has been extremely dynamic and, I suspect, unique. Fox had been friends with some of the Rotenese poets already for years or even decades before the first meeting. Many of the poets attended multiple gatherings, and Ande Ruy, the best-known chanter (*manahelo*) on Rote (Fox 2016: 259), has never missed one. Days are organized around three collective meals, usually with an initial recording session after breakfast; other sessions for recording, discussion or photos, work on translation and transcription, excursions, and so forth are arranged flexibly, alongside organizing visits with participants' family and friends who may be in Bali and occasional gatherings in the evenings. The poets present and perform in their own languages and dialects while the collective language is Indonesian, noting that speakers of different Rotenese dialects customarily use Indonesian with one another, so a mixed Rotenese group still shifts to Indonesian for conversation. I am still learning Indonesian, relying heavily on Fox, Pellu and gestures in communication, a fieldwork situation that is new for me. In collective interviews at the 2019 meeting, our diverse community, established and evolving across years, was described enthusiastically as a "family".

The structure of roles in these meetings might be compared to that of Bullock's exhibition. Some of us organize the meetings and funds for them and try to manage the overall structure; some organize practical matters and work with transcription and translation; some primarily manage representations of their cultures and traditions and may also be involved in transcription and translation, either alone or in collaboration. The dynamics of authority operate at multiple levels simultaneously: those of us who organize have authority over the venue, arranging scheduling and trying to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to present what they want to present. The performers exercise authority over what they present, and they may in some cases discuss with one another about what is presented and in what way, while the rest of us are there to learn. Those of us who organize the meetings of course come to them with ideas about what we hope to learn, want to ask about or prompt. However, requests or prompts may be met with disinterest, explanations why such and such is not interesting or appropriate to perform and/or with a counter-proposal as an alternative. The specialists in knowledge also arrive with ideas about what they want to present, and they respond to one another's presentations. They may determine that we should record a particular piece of knowledge owing to a conversation over dinner; they may announce what they choose to present only when sitting down for recording or even plan a whole recording session among themselves. What happens at a meeting is thus quite fluid.

At these meetings, presentations of traditional verbal art and knowledge for documentation are generally recognized as more formalized than talk and narration

over a meal: it is organized in a collective space and coordinated with recording equipment. When I first participated in these gatherings, I was struck by the contexts of specialists' embodied performance of cultural identity through traditional dress (cf. Barthes 1967: 25–27; Sahlins 1976: chapter 4), and where such self-representation was relaxed or not seen as relevant. In Indonesia, textiles and headgear are prominent emblems of identity (cf. Perani & Wolff 1999). Western styles of clothing are generally commonplace, as is wearing a hijab among Muslim women. Rotenese and Tetun men's traditional dress has key components of a sarong, a scarf worn over the shoulder or around the neck, and a hat or traditionally-folded headscarf. In a more formal context, these are worn together with what might be described as a dress shirt. Such attire establishes signs in the Indonesian folk cultural sphere, although Indonesia is such a large and diverse place that the ability to distinguish between local and regional types and cultures can vary from place to place, as can perspectives on their significance.

All meetings before 2019 were oriented toward audio documentation with special sessions organized for photos of participants; traditional dress was only explicitly requested for the photo sessions. The Tetun performers were generally conservative in dress: both specialists at the 2017 meeting normally wore full traditional dress any time they went into a public environment, while a third Tetun specialist, Simon Bere, who joined the 2019 meeting, was comfortable leaving the hotel without a hat and wearing a light jacket over his other clothes, although he invariably wore a sarong. Piet Tahu is a *makoan*, a keeper and conveyer of traditional knowledge chosen by the ancestors, which places ritual conditions on his dress when performing in that role: he should wear white and be bare-chested when speaking anything of ritual import, and he would then change to go to lunch (see **Figure 2**). The Rotenese were generally more relaxed, commonly wearing a t-shirt and shorts or pants even in spontaneous singing, dance, speeches or performance of poetry or knowledge. However, they would invariably present themselves in traditional dress (if occasionally without their hats) in any official role at the meeting, whether performing for (audio) documentation or when, for example, all of the Rotenese performers were asked to discuss the poetic language and its variation across different dialects. Video recording was introduced at the 2019 meeting, which led Rotenese participants to wear traditional dress more often when entering the common space to listen to others perform and present (**Figure 3**), although not consistently.

Within a European context, folk culture, especially with regard to dress and verbal art, is widely seen as remote, objectified and belonging to the past. Viewed through the same lens, Rotenese or Tetun culture is easily exoticized, and their traditional dress also appeared exotic to people in Bali, for whom it is foreign. For the Rotenese and

Figure 2: Piet Tahu performs the knowledge "Gardening in Wehali". From left to right: Simon Bere, Gabriel Bria, Piet Tahu and James J. Fox. (Photo: Frog, Bali, 2019).

Figure 3: Jonas Mooy performs with his stringed instrument. From left to right: Jonas Mooy, James J. Fox, Ande Ruy, Kornalius Medah and Mikkris Ruy. (Photo: Frog, Bali, 2019).

Tetun, however, traditional dress was a type of formal self-presentation, comparable to wearing a suit, but the cultural signs constitutive of that suit simultaneously belonged to the folk cultural sphere, even if the particular cultural identities that they indexed were not always clear, for example to local Balinese.

In the multicultural environment of Indonesia, the usage and role of cultural signs occurs in the context of particular groups, although these signs may seem exotic to others. During the 2017 meeting, a royal wedding on Rote was nationally televised. The host of the broadcast, Yeri Fanggidae, wore Rotenese traditional dress with a traditional betel-areca nut basket on his knee and had a backdrop of Rotenese textiles: the scene was constructed by drawing on signs iconic of Rotenese identity when addressing the national audience.[4] Rotenese hats in particular are extremely distinctive (see **Figure 3**). Their significance to Rotenese identity is reflected in the architecture of Rote's Regent Office, which is designed to look as though it wears such a hat, identifying this element of traditional costume as a symbol of political power.

Performances of culture are also integrated into political engagements. The national motto of Indonesia is the Old Javanese expression *Bhinneka tunggal ika* (Unity in diversity), with cultural diversity and unification played out in political encounters between local and national agents.[5] For example, when President Joko Widodo visited the Island of Rote in 2018, he received dramatic receptions such as a corridor of women performing traditional dance as he walked through.[6] Ande Ruy also officially greeted him with Rotenese ritual poetry as the president disembarked from his plane.[7] In turn, the President wore a Rotenese scarf across one shoulder, creating a symbolic connection between national authority and the local culture.[8] Such transpositions of symbols create connections and participation, however transient, in identity. During the photo session at the 2017 meeting, the Rotenese participants encouraged my wife and me to dress in Rotenese sarongs and scarves with a hat for a photo. In 2019, the highly visible presence of the Rotenese in their hats led hotel staff and tourists to ask for photos with them, which prompted the Rotenese to suggest that the enthusiasts also try on their hats. During one of the dancing sessions, these emblems of identity were exchanged within the group: Rotenese and Tetun performers first traded a few scarves and then

[4] See e.g. YouTube, Barang…: 01:20–01:36.

[5] The motto "unity in diversity" does not mean a uniform acceptance of and support for all forms of diversity, for instance of language and religion (e.g. Kuipers 1998). However, the visual performances of identity through embodied self-representation discussed here operate outside of areas of controversy. (The limits of national social acceptability do not concern us here.)

[6] YouTube, Pengarahan…: 01:15–01:24.

[7] YouTube, Pengarahan…: 01:24–02:26.

[8] YouTube, Pengarahan…: 02:51ff.; YouTube, HY & Presiden Jokowi: 32:19–32:40, etc.

hats, a play of juxtapositions that reinforced the sense of unity in our diversity. The folk cultural sphere's rich reservoirs of powerfully charged symbols are integrated parts of the lived culture of different communities in Indonesia, symbols that are strategically used and manipulated in venues ranging from politics to private gatherings.

Participants in our meetings exercise their agency through their participation itself, what they choose to perform and their self-representation in performance, and even in actively transposing signs linked with their identities onto others. Whereas Bullock's Sámi exhibition was oriented toward public display, the Indonesian meetings aimed at documenting and understanding. They provided, however, a springboard for other media, such as audio and video recording and also publications ranging from scientific monographs and articles to videos on YouTube. Unlike most early written representations of the Sámi, the mediation of Indonesian culture in what was documented and publicized did not erase the voices and agents behind the knowledge and traditions they presented (e.g. Fox 2016). The performers were approached as authoritative representatives of their respective traditions, and participation in the meetings bolstered their authority in their home communities.

The electronic and material texts that performers produced enabled their historical endurance comparable to Snorri's *Edda* and early texts on Sámi. Those of us who produce published texts based on the corpora will inevitably subject what has been documented to processes of selection and representation, which will feed back into the construction of the folk cultural sphere. It is yet to be determined whether these activities will stimulate broader knowledge of, and interest in, the cultures and their traditions, as Bullock's very different activities did for the Sámi, yet the choice to participate in these meetings leads these performers rather than others to belong to the selection of authoritative voices in the resulting corpora. Consequently, the recorded performers will eventually be viewed relative to one another rather than relative to the present and past networks that they represent. Ande Ruy will stand out owing to qualitative assessments, but also because his active participation across so many years will result in a quantitatively substantial contribution to the corpus.

Daily Life as an Ethnographic Exhibition

Living ethnographic displays are not simply a thing of the past, nor are they exclusively implemented and orchestrated by a dominant group objectifying a folk culture as other. Cultural tourism is a rapidly evolving area in Indonesia, and rural tourism has been developing with the relatively recent turn to ecotourism and "authentic" experience. This has given rise to so-called tourism villages (*desa wisata*). The Village Tourism

program was launched by the Indonesian government in 2005, followed by the National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM Mandiri) initiated in 2007, a community-based tourism development model that covered 569 tourism villages by 2011 (PNPM; GEOC; Vitasurya, Hardiman & Sari 2018: 1). Not all tourism villages are identically organized, nor are all equally successful, but the basic idea is to turn a rural village into an ethnographic exhibition of itself, organized, implemented and managed by the respective village community.

The domain of Yogyakarta on Java has been prominent in these developments; there were 38 tourism villages operating there in 2012 and 81 in 2018 (Vitasurya 2016: 18; Vitasurya, Hardiman & Sari 2018: 1). Villages organize tourism around the different resources and attractions available to them, from features of the local landscape or local architecture to local crafts (ibid. 2018: 5–8). Pentingsari village, located about 25 kilometers from the center of Yogyakarta city, became active as a tourism village in 2008. This tourism village has been described as relying on the "authenticity" of the "mountain village atmosphere" (ibid. 2018: 6), although tourism villages tend to be characterized by the extensive modernization of the built environment (Herawati et al. 2014: 90). Pentingsari's success is reflected in awards and also in both the built environment's development and the livelihood of its residents (Herawati et al. 2014). Much as the success of Bullock's exhibition was tied to his engagement with the press (Andersson Burnett 2016: 182), a study of Pentingsari's success recently found that "the more actively social media popularizes tourist attractions, the more tourists will decide to visit" (Priatmoko 2017: 80). In this case, social media would appear to be a more significant draw to a tourism village than either the particular attractions it offers or its infrastructure (ibid.: 80–81).

In July 2018, my wife and I visited Pentingsari with a homestay in the household of one of the founding organizers of the tourism village. By 2016, already 83% of the village community was involved in renting rooms for homestays, with a total of 50 houses equipped for this, allowing for up to 400 guests on any given night (Vitasurya 2016: 21–22). Our homestay package included home-cooked meals and a variety of activities. During our stay, we were accompanied by guides who walked with us through the village, explaining things about its history and village life. We were led into people's yards and outbuildings to pet and feed their livestock or to pick and taste fruit, which for us often entailed illustrations of how to peel or open the latter. We even visited homes to stop for a snack or for a traditional activity. One building was devoted to playing gamelan (a traditional percussion ensemble), and there we received a spontaneous lesson with several children. We planted rice in a rice paddy and went on an educationally oriented nature hike; we visited a nighttime theater of

"living puppets" (*wayang orang*) in a neighboring village, made tempe (a traditional soy product), tried locally-made coffee, wove shadow puppets from grass, learned the challenge of doing batik and so on. The visit was organized and orchestrated, filling our days with a buffet of activities and information. The connection between activity and expense was erased by the "package" through which we were guided: everything was simply offered by people in the community (as part of the package) and this was not accompanied by attempts to sell us anything. Activities, snacks, coffee, picking fruit and so forth blurred into personal hospitality shown to guests, producing an experience that combined immersion in a village community with personal acceptance through the connection to our host, as well as with enjoying a living museum with pre-arranged displays where we could try traditional activities.

Tourism villages like Pentingsari offer the experience of local traditional culture, which it constructs as heritage within a pedagogical project (cf. Vitasurya, Hardiman & Sari 2018: 6; Hafstein 2018: 4). We were told that the village receives about 300 visitors per day. The village caters primarily to Indonesian tourism, including visits from schools, universities, organizations and institutions from the Yogyakarta region, but it also hosts groups coming from as far away as Europe (cf. Herawati et al. 2014: 96). Our host stressed the function of the tourism village in teaching people about village life. The urbanization process has been very rapid in Indonesia, with the consequence that there is not necessarily a gap of several generations between people in the urban environments and the activities and ways of life associated with village culture. So-called traditional culture is simultaneously contemporary culture. Rather than heritage construction being characterized by drawing boundaries between culture of the past and of the present (cf. Smith 2006: 12), in Indonesia the opposition emerges between rural and urban culture, and to varying degrees between local and national culture. The tourism village initiative gave sustainability to village culture by reinventing it, giving the culture value and developing an economy around it, even if the income it produces is mainly as a supplement to other forms of livelihood (Herawati et al. 2014: 96–97). This was accomplished in Pentingsari by bringing into focus powerful symbols of the folk cultural sphere both linked to Java and also to Indonesia more generally. These included shadow puppets, batik, gamelan, tempe, rice planting and coffee preparation. The folk cultural sphere enabled and shaped the development of the tourism village by making sets of symbols of culture recognizable and meaningful when framed as heritage. At the same time, the organization of a tourism village is built on processes of selection and representation, aiming toward an ideal and idyllic experience, which inevitably also involves the erasure of some elements.

It is easy to view Pentingsari and other tourism villages as reflecting a unified collective effort. However, we were told that certain villagers but not others were involved when the project took shape, and only gradually did it extend through the village's community. Participation in activities linked to village tourism varies according to resources and competence (Herawati et al. 2014: 97). Although the initial organization of activities linked to village tourism did not uniformly involve all households, those without special skills can easily be involved as guides or in providing hospitality such as food service and homestay accommodation. Homestays are the dominant form of community participation (Vitasurya 2016: 21), and villagers develop their own homes through renovation and expansion (Vitasurya 2016: 22–29). Visitors may request particular facilities, creating a degree of competition between providers (Herawati et al. 2014: 97). Village tourism emerged as a means of local community empowerment, and it can be viewed with community agency in focus, but there are also dynamics of individual agency operating within that community. It is individuals who interact with visitors, both developing their experiences and promoting further social media attention to the village, creating an interplay of individual and collective activity. The Pentingsari community has created, continuously performs and thereby asserts a replicable model of what a traditional village is and should be. By marketing this model to hundreds of people daily, they actively participate in the construction of the Indonesian folk cultural sphere.

Culture Under Construction

As a generalized perception and understanding of traditional culture, a folk cultural sphere is linked to discourses about culture that involve reflexivity. This reflexivity leads people to associate cultural sign systems with identities and situations viewed from particular social positions – associations through which the ideologies of a folk cultural sphere flourish (Urban 2001; Gal & Irvine 2019). As a condition for cultural signs to enter into the folk cultural sphere, I posit that the signs must become identified as signs of difference, linked to one group or some groups as opposed to others, or linked to the past in ways that other signs in the present are not. This condition situates a folk cultural sphere within a broader cultural context and in relation to perspectives. The role of difference in constructing a folk cultural sphere is complemented by its inclusion of signs identified with or familiar to multiple groups and identities – that is, to multiple social positions from which it may be regularly engaged and in relation to which variant ideologies evolve (Gal & Irvine 2019). This diversity can produce a sort of feedback loop that reciprocally shapes a folk cultural sphere. The traditional Rotenese hat is not displayed in the architecture of the island's Regent Office solely because it is a

characteristic element of traditional Rotenese costume, but also because of how it is seen and responded to by non-Rotenese, constructing it as a political symbol of Rotenese identity within Indonesia. Pentingsari's pedagogical project is also an economic project, placing locals' ideas about traditional village culture in a dialogue with consumers' expectations and interests, and feeding back into those expectations and interests. This process can shift a folk cultural sphere's center, and can impact what it includes or how cultural signs and sign systems or their variations relate to different groups.

In the five cases discussed above, agency, media and authority do not form a regular and predictable system; instead, they interact in complementary and interdependent ways. Authority is a perceived quality based on a relative asymmetry. Although it is interesting to consider the dynamics of individual authority being applied through different media and how such activities may reciprocally build the individual's authority, more interesting here is the interplay of different types of authority in collaboration and how a medium may affect the perception of authority while limiting the competing voices to which it is relative. In the medium of Bullock's living exhibition of the Sámi, Jens and Kerina Holms were appointed as accidental authorities on Sámi culture by virtue of being the only Sámi present. Snorri is an authority in Old Norse mythology today not because of his outstanding work as a mythographer according to some universal standard, but because of a lack of competition. Ande Ruy's authority will be relative to a larger number of poets recorded from his domain of Ringgou on Rote, but, in the future, this number will be quite few relative to the number in the society and the number there have been over time. A medium also increases the reach and visibility of potential influence, which may increase impact without greater authority, as among tourism villages. It may also restructure relative authority through relative attention, like the impact of being invited abroad to perform for foreigners on the reputation of Rotenese poets at home. Moreover, media that produce enduring material or electronic products enable these to potentially circulate on their own: *Edda* and early written texts on Sámi became authorities in themselves, independent of the intentions, interpretations or even the identities of those who created them. In all cases, however, impact invariably seems to trace back to agency. A folk cultural sphere is carried on the momentum of the transmission of culture, yet the social phenomenon concerns people doing things and talking about them. Individuals' exertion of agency can be instrumental in shaping or changing a folk cultural sphere, while their impact is bound up with their engagement with particular media and is linked to authority.

The perspectives bound up with folk cultural spheres may be parallel and aligned or competing in their models for understanding, evaluating and also performing culture and identities. Competing perspectives clearly emerge in the cases of Snorri's *Edda* and

early writings on Sámi. As a folk cultural sphere ascends to dominance, alternatives are eclipsed or subordinated, which can lead to a discontinuity of alternative knowledge and practices, as in Snorri's *Edda* becoming the mythology itself or Sámi practices disappearing under Christianity. Minority groups naturalized to a dominant folk cultural sphere and its ideology will normally draw on it as a source for modelling their own culture. Being naturalized to the models leads them to be taken for granted as part of the natural world order, so these groups normally work within those models rather than building up new ones independently. This pattern is no more uniform than the ways in which people engage with a dominant folk cultural sphere, and it can produce complex situations. For example, some representatives of a minority may contest models of the dominant sphere as misrepresentative clichés while others reproduce or adapt the same clichés as an integrated part of how they support the minority culture (Stepanova 2020). Competing and conflicting perspectives on a folk cultural sphere and its ideologies can be found even where groups are working toward the same goal.

The operation and development of folk cultural spheres occur within broader environments that reciprocally shape them. For instance, most vernacular mythology probably lacked reflexive perception as tradition before being brought into focus through Christianity's spread, which polarized it as anti-Christian and to be eradicated. Snorri's *Edda* is probably not exceptional for trying to negotiate a vernacular mythology's compatibility with the new religion. What sets it apart is that it reframed the mythology and demonstrated its value and relevance *on the terms of the Christian milieu's authoritative mode of discourse, and using rhetoric carried by the Church*. This strategy appears to have made it sustainable. The Church-authorized folk cultural sphere in Scandinavia most likely took up many traditions as it spread, stigmatized them as pagan, and these were gradually eradicated and forgotten as the Church-authorized folk cultural sphere became dominant. Most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century descriptions of the Sámi developed within that framework. The difference from earlier Christianization activity was that the Reformation made vernacular language a medium for religion. The attention to vernacular language was coupled with a new interest in cultural documentation, which presumably stimulated greater attention to Sámi culture and traditions. Similarly, village life in Pentingsari would probably receive no interest in the wake of modernization and urbanization if the latter were not accompanied by ideologies that confer value on village life as culture and heritage. Bringing the folk cultural sphere into focus provides a means to analyze these discourses and developments, but it is important to recognize that folk cultural spheres do not operate in isolation.

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